



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Seniors Advocate report underscores need to invest in new residential care facilities – HEU

B.C. needs a plan to build more public and non-profit residential care facilities to meet the care needs of the province's aging population, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

The union is responding to today's report from B.C.'s Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie showing that the number of available new care beds continues to be outpaced by the province's growing population of seniors over the age of 75.

The *Monitoring Seniors' Services* report also shows that despite some marginal improvement in wait times for residential care placement over the past year, 40 per cent of seniors are forced to wait for a bed beyond 30 days.

"B.C. needs a capital plan to build more public and non-profit residential care facilities in order to meet current and future demand," says HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside. "Our province is experiencing a shortage of residential care beds that will only become more severe if we fail to create the beds needed to meet anticipated growth in the number of seniors requiring care."

She also says increased residential care capacity must be accompanied with a reinvestment in home support and improved staffing across the entire continuum of seniors' care services.

And Whiteside warns against B.C.'s growing reliance on private corporations to provide funded residential care beds, which leaves the health system vulnerable to business decisions beyond its direct control.

From 2001 to 2016, the portion of funded beds operated by for-profit corporations increased by 42 per cent, while the portion of beds in health authority and non-profit sites fell by 11 per cent.

"Residential care facilities that are privately owned and operated are heavily subsidized by taxpayers through commercial contracts with health authorities," says Whiteside. "These facilities can be bought and sold, converted to other uses, or liquidated altogether."

"The only way to reduce our reliance on private ownership and operation, before we deepen a crisis that is already in play, is to create a plan that provides health authorities and non-profit organizations with access to the capital needed to build our residential care homes."

And she says, "In all good conscience, we cannot continue to allow vulnerable seniors to risk illness and injury, or languish in hospital beds, because we have refused to build the facilities we so desperately need."

Earlier this fall, the union advocated for a new residential care capital plan in its submission to the B.C. legislature's finance committee.

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